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REGIONAL APPROACH TO DISARMAMENT WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL SECURITY

The relationship between disarmament and global security, and principles and guidelines for regional disarmament and arms control initiatives

Working paper submitted by Australia

Within the last 45 years or so there has developed an understanding of the increasing interdependence of world events. The complex of problems confronting the world - economic, security, environmental and the like - no longer can be quite so readily quarantined from each other as they might have been in the past.

This is particularly so with regard to regional disarmament measures. Initiatives taken in one part of the world clearly can have some carry-over to other regions, at best if only in helping to reduce global tensions. At worst, regional initiatives might have negative consequences, as in the case where weapons reductions are offset by weapons build-up in other parts of the world.

Global security should not be seen as the sum of a number of regional disarmament developments. Rather, regional disarmament and security measures, while a necessary part of the security landscape, must be seen as complementary to global efforts to bring about a more peaceful and safer world.

It is not necessary to define in precise terms what we mean by a region. Nor is it necessary to classify a region. A region, in security terms, is where security issues coalesce. This means that a group of countries, members of a larger region may show an interest in resolving a security issue, much as the Contadora countries have for example.

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Another example is the Treaty of Rarotonga. Australia joined with the other South Pacific States to elaborate the South Pacific nuclear-free zone, while recognizing that there were other dimensions to our security, dimensions which require us to think in broader Asia/Pacific terms. Such considerations clearly apply to most other countries, and so it is probably better if we think of, or even mentally define, regions as issue specific.

In considering what principles and guidelines should be applied to regional disarmament and arms control initiatives, the following are suggested in no particular order:

1. Regional arrangements and measures should respect the purposes and principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and conform with international law and treaties.

2. Regional initiatives should take into account interdependence between neighbouring regions:

   - As has been noted, the question of what to do with arms made redundant by arms limitations agreements is relevant. Some of these weapons may be destroyed by mutual agreement, but the temptation to dump any surplus arms in another region, or the temptation of potential recipients to secure sophisticated weapons at bargain basement prices must be resisted.

3. There is a need to ensure that regional initiatives do not undermine global initiatives.

4. Regional initiatives should come from within the region itself:

   - Clearly, external events may stimulate initiatives, for example, successful efforts in one region might inspire others to undertake similar initiatives in their own. The success of the CSCE process obviously is an example that other regions might wish to examine. And a particularly intractable problem like the Middle East might benefit from an external catalyst. None the less the fact remains that unless the region as a whole is fully committed to a particular process, an enduring solution will be difficult, if not impossible to achieve.

5. To be fully committed to a process, States clearly must have equal voices in developing the solution, regardless of their size or military strength:

   - This principle was respected in the Rarotonga Treaty negotiations and ensured the successful conclusion of that treaty.

6. Regional disarmament should aim to promote and increase stability in the region, taking into account the overall relationship between security in the region and global security as a whole.

7. Regional disarmament initiatives should seek to remove destabilizing imbalances:

   - The legitimate defence interests of States need to be respected but recent events in the Gulf show only too well how gross imbalances can lead to insecurity and ultimately conflict.

8. It is important that all other States, in particular the most militarily powerful, respect regional initiatives.

9. It is not necessary for any particular State or group of States to take the lead, although obviously initiatives successful in the most volatile of regions will have immediate and more dramatic impact than might otherwise be the case.

10. Transparency and openness is an essential ingredient in regional disarmament and arms control, as indeed they are to global efforts.